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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3305
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0192
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3394
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0433
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2475
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 7044
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4865
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001887

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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TAGS: PREL PTER PHUM PREF MOPS CE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: KARUNA PARAMILITARY IMPLICATED IN WAVE
OF ABDUCTIONS

REF: A. COLOMBO 1622

¶B. COLOMBO 1617 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James R. Moore for reasons 1.4(b
,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Batticaloa-based Karuna group, which split from the northern Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) leadership in March 2004, has renamed itself the Tamil Makkal Vidutalai Pulikkal (TMVP), or Tamil People's Liberation Tigers. The TMVP claims to be a democratic organization with a "defensive" military wing (septel). But NGOs, international observers and civilians allege that the TMVP is involved in dozens of abductions and disappearances of Tamil businesspeople and political dissidents in Colombo and the east. The TMVP leadership and senior police authorities respond that a criminal ring is using Karuna's name in an extortion racket. Septel will report on indications of cooperation between elements of the government security forces and the Karuna group in Sri Lanka's East.
End Summary.

NGOs See Karuna Hand

¶2. (C) Evidence in a series of abductions of Tamil businessmen and professionals in Colombo and the east -- the independent Civil Monitoring Committee reported 56 in September and October of this year -- appears to point to the Batticaloa-based Karuna group, which split from the northern Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) leadership in March 2004. The Karuna group has renamed itself the Tamil Makkal Vidutalai Pulikkal (TMVP), or Tamil People's Liberation Tigers, and opened political offices in Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Vavuniya and Colombo. Non-governmental humanitarian agencies, the independent press, and even some police authorities have contended that the TMVP is involved in dozens of abductions and disappearances of Tamil businesspeople and political dissidents in Colombo and the east.

13. (C) The Consortium for Humanitarian Agencies, an umbrella group for over 100 local and international non-governmental organizations working in Sri Lanka, sees a Karuna hand in the plethora of recent abductions. The CHA desk officer in the eastern district of Ampara told POL FSN on November 6 that most abductions take place on Friday afternoons after humanitarian agencies' offices have closed. People are frightened to report abductions to authorities, but will often address complaints to CHA and other agencies. She claimed that the LTTE and the Karuna group abduct teenage children to "replenish their cadres," but that in addition to military recruitment, the Karuna faction abducts business people as a fund raising tactic. A representative of the indigenous Human Rights Commission told POL FSN that "kidnappers often hand-deliver Karuna group visiting cards to abductees' families."

Police Leadership Indict "Mobsters"

14. (C) On November 2, DCM, RSO and poloff met with Inspector General of Police Victor Perera. When the DCM raised concern about the number of abductions in Colombo and in the north and east, IGP Perera responded, "We have the situation under control now. We've arrested three gangs." He claimed that the gangs "led by two Muslim army deserters and a woman" were motivated by money and seemed only to be using the names of the Karuna and the LTTE. He added, "They're running extortion businesses and have nothing to do with political groups. We're pressuring our units to investigate, but we are stretched to the limit protecting vital installations due to the security environment."

COLOMBO 00001887 002 OF 003

15. (C) On the subject of abductions for extortion and recruitment, which the independent press and NGOs have tied to the Karuna faction, TMVP secretary Pathmini insisted to poloff November 1 that "the LTTE is recruiting in Karuna's name" and that others are trying to frame the Karuna group. She said the TMVP wished to "clarify" any complaint received by UNICEF to demonstrate that the Karuna group was not responsible for the abductions.

16. (C) In an October 4 interview with the independent Sunday Leader newspaper, Civil Monitoring Committee member and Western Province People's Front leader Mano Ganesan expressed surprise that the GSL would deny the Karuna group's involvement in abductions. He argued, "One of the persons arrested (in a Colombo abduction case) confessed to being a member of the Karuna group. The Karuna Group itself has admitted that one of its members was arrested." He added, "We believe that part of the government is involved in these abductions. We are not accusing the government in total."

17. (C) New Left Front leader Wickramabahu Karunaratne (Sinhalese) told the BBC on October 1 that a suspect recently arrested in a Colombo abduction case was "very clearly" a member of a "government-backed Tamil militant group." He added that "some police officers alleged that the Karuna faction carries out abductions, but it's clear that group is linked to the government."

18. (C) Defense Spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella answered Ganesan and Karunaratne's allegations in an October 4 statement to the press, saying, "We are also looking for Karuna. If he is responsible for the abductions we will certainly take him to task."

University Dean Abducted

19. (S) In an October 22 meeting with poloff, Eastern University Dean Sugamar, a 2006 International Visitor Program nominee (strictly protect), held the Karuna group responsible for his September 30 abduction in Batticaloa. During his

detention, Sugamar said his Tamil-speaking captors repeatedly accused him of being an LTTE supporter. Sugamar denied any political affiliation. Sugamar's brother-in-law (protect), a prominent Colombo physician, said he called on President Mahinda Rajapaksa on October 6 to express concern about Mr. Sugamar's disappearance. The doctor claimed, "The President called (Defense Secretary) Gotabaya (Rajapaksa) in front of me and said he'd do something about it. It's hard to say how high up it goes. The President portrayed himself as a statesman, saying, 'we're doing our best.'"

¶10. (C) After a ten-day captivity, Sugamar said, one of his captors told him, "We've been pressured from many levels to release you." (Note: The Embassy expressed its deep concern to the MFA over Sugamar's abduction. End note.) The next day, Sugamar was released after being asked to tell the media that "he was taken for a purpose and released upon fulfillment of that purpose." He confided in poloff that while he knew the Karuna group had kidnapped him, he feared making this public.

Stopping the Abductions

¶11. (C) COMMENT: Non-governmental organizations and local and international press have repeatedly called on the Government of Sri Lanka to take action against the kidnappers. The police have established a committee to inquire into abductions, and government-run media have highlighted abduction cases in news items about the President's newly announced Commission of Inquiry on human rights violations. If, in fact, some government security forces prove to have links to the Karuna faction, it is within the GSL's scope to

COLOMBO 00001887 003 OF 003

stop such extra-judicial disappearances. It is incumbent upon the government to address this issue, and we will continue to press the point in our meetings with GSL officials.

BLAKE